

Come As You Are by EvieSmallwood

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Summary:

“It’s nothing,” she leans away from his blunt touch, hissing. “Just the same bullshit in a different spot.”

It comes out even if she doesn’t want it to. That’s always sort of been the case with Mike; the truth is blurted from her mouth before she can even blink, because he somehow draws it out of her. Friends don’t lie. It’s more than a promise. It’s an unconscious pact, a god-damned oath, and she’d made it as soon as he’d labelled her one of the party.

Come As You Are

Author's Note:

I LOVE THESE TWO

She ends up standing in front of his house, shivering to the bone. Her clothes are soaked through and her hair is stuck to her face in thin strands. She can barely breathe, the air is so cold; it's like daggers tearing at her lungs.

Behind her are the darkened windows of the Sinclair residence; an empty driveway, a mailbox stuffed with at least three days worth of letters. They're out of town. They have been the whole weekend, but she'd forgotten. She'd run here anyway, cheek still stinging from the impact it's taken, and stopped short.

But the Wheeler house is alight with life. Yellowish light fills the windows—even through the curtains she can see it. The place looks so warm and inviting. She can practically *smell* whatever pie or cake Mrs. Wheeler is baking.

I can't just show up, she berates herself, wrapping her arms tight around her own torso. *Not looking like this.*

She knows her cheek is probably bright red and starting to bruise. She can feel the beaded scab on her lip, from where it had split and bled.

Almost resigned, Max starts to turn anyway when she hears it; the clinking of cans and grunting. She squints through the dark and makes out a tall lanky form.

Mike The Douchebag Wheeler is dragging two loaded trash bags down the drive, practically drowning in his own rain jacket. It must be new.

She doesn't know what keeps her feet rooted to the spot, even through every fibre of her being is screaming at her to leave. But then he sees her and stops short.

“Max?!”

“Yeah, it’s me,” she rolls her eyes. “Don’t cream your panties.”

Even though things are still awkward between them sometimes, and they fight more than they agree on anything, he still grins at her remark. It’s replaced quickly by a confused, furrowed brow. “What are you doing here? It’s pouring—you’re *soaked*.”

“No shit, Wheeler,” she snaps. *I should just leave. No one wants me anyway. What am I even doing?*

Mike steps toward her anyway, squinting. His eyes widen as soon as he takes in the bruises and blood. “Fuck,” he abandons the trash bags and hurries toward her. “Are you okay? What happened?”

“It’s nothing,” she leans away from his blunt touch, hissing. “Just the same bullshit in a different spot.”

It comes out even if she doesn’t want it to. That’s always sort of been the case with Mike; the truth is blurted from her mouth before she can even blink, because he somehow draws it out of her. *Friends don’t lie*. It’s more than a promise. It’s an unconscious pact, a god-damned *oath*, and she’d made it as soon as he’d labelled her one of the party.

Mike’s face is dark. She’s seen that look enough times, but it’s not directed at her, now. He seems to be looking past her, directing his anger at the shapeless darkness of the neighborhood.

“Come on,” he grabs her wrist, his tone is *no questions*, and she can’t help but wince. It makes Mike freeze. “I’m not gonna hurt you.”

“No, I know,” she shakes her head. *Stupid*. “I’m just... jumpy. Sorry.”

He nods, letting go of her and leading her with a jerk of his head, instead. They walk around the house, headed toward the basement door on the side.

Inside, it’s warm. Mike doesn’t even have to fumble to find a light switch. She feels her tension bleed away when all of the familiar boyish mess is suddenly visible; old pizza boxes, comic books, homework sheets, and the model of the solar system they’ve all been

working on.

“Here.”

Max swivels around. There’s a sweatshirt in Mike’s hand. She takes it and pulls it over her head, struck with the familiar scent of pine and popcorn. *Lucas*.

He must’ve forgotten it.

“I’ll go get you something,” Mike tells her. “For your face, I mean.”

Max nods. She doesn’t have the energy to protest, suddenly; she sinks down onto the ratty couch and pulls her knees up to her chest, closing her eyes. Exhaustion washes over her like a blanket laid on her shoulders. She feels so heavy and awful.

It feels like only five seconds pass before the basement stairs are creaking. Lifting her head up takes a ridiculous amount of effort.

Mike is holding a bag of peas. He sits down beside her and wordlessly presses it to her cheek. “Was it Billy?”

Billy. She almost scoffs. “No.”

“Oh.” Mike fidgets and looks away, leg bouncing. He always seems to have so much spare energy to work off.

“I have arms, you know.”

“Oh,” he says, again. “Okay.”

Max takes hold of the peas, weakly pressing them to her already cold skin. Mike seems to take notice that she’s still dripping and shivering a little. He shoots up and hurries into the small corner bathroom, coming back with a fluffy blue towel. “It’s clean,” is all he says.

She gingerly grabs it, letting the peas fall into her lap, and starts wringing out her hair. The ends get all frizzy, but at least she doesn’t feel like a wet mop anymore.

Mike perches himself across from her this time, sitting on the low

table in front of the couch. "You don't have to talk about it," he starts. "But if you want to, I mean, I'm here."

Max shrugs. "It was Neil," she admits, ridiculously easily. "It's nothing new, either. It happens all the time. In front of my own mom, and she doesn't say anything. She just looks the other way, 'cuz she knows he'll hit her, too. And she's scared. She married a complete douchebag and she just lets him hurt me. She doesn't give a damn about anyone but herself."

By the end of it, her voice is wavering and her eyes are full of tears. One escapes, sliding down her bruised cheek. Max can't stomach looking at Mike, who's never had to deal with this shit and probably doesn't even know what the fuck to do—

His hand squeezes her own. "It isn't your fault," he says, firmly. "What's happening—he shouldn't hit you, or your mom. None of that is okay."

It's something she already sort of knows, but without warning she finds herself doubling over in tears, eyes stinging. "I hate him," she sobs. "I hate them *both*."

"Don't."

It startles her so much she chokes. "W-What?"

"Don't," he says again. "Don't give them the satisfaction of knowing that they've hurt you."

She blearily wipes her eyes. "But they do."

She sounds like a little kid, but Mike doesn't treat her like one. "One day, Mayfield, you won't even have to give them a second thought. You'll be living your own life, with your own people, and their bullshit will be a little bump in the road. You're strong. If anyone can make it through something like this, it's you."

"You think?"

He rolls his eyes. "You've taken on inter-dimensional monsters *and* your crazy-ass brother. I *know* so."

Max feels her eyes start to droop. Mike lets go of her hand and stands, throwing a nearby blanket over her. “You can sleep here tonight,” he tells her. “We’ll make like, pancakes in the morning, or something.”

Max rolls onto her back. “With M&Ms?”

Mike grins, nodding. “Definitely. Night, Mayfield.”

“Night, Wheeler.”

The Adventures of M&M: Overcoming Familial Troubles, she thinks, listening to his retreating footsteps.

It makes her smile just a little.

Author's Note:

So, I sort of wrote this out of nowhere. That’s what happens when you listen to angsty punk rock in your bedroom.

The title is named after Nirvana’s *Come As You Are*, which is obviously iconic. Max’s “cream your panties” line was inspired by everyone’s favourite mom, Mr. Stephen John Harrington.

Thanks for reading!